

FLS

THE ENVIRONMENT

IN FRENCH AND
FRANCOPHONE LITERATURE
AND FILM

书馆

VOLUME XXXIX
2012

(French Literature Series, Volume XXXIX, 2012)

THE ENVIRONMENT

in French and
Francophone Literature
and Film

Edited by
Jeff Persels



Amsterdam – New York, NY 2012

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ISBN: 978-90-420-3613-0

E-Book ISBN: 978-94-012-0884-0

©Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam - New York, NY 2012

Printed in The Netherlands

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Since 1974 the French Literature Series has been published in conjunction with the annual French Literature Conference, sponsored by the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures of the University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina, USA. In addition to the scholarly papers selected for publication by the Editorial Board, it also accepts notes on the conference topic.

The conference, which is scheduled for the end of March or beginning of April each year, focuses on a pre-announced topic. The deadline for submitting conference papers is November 1; for scholarly notes, the following May 1. Submissions should be prepared according to the MLA Handbook and should not exceed fifteen pages (25 lines per page, double-spacing, with ample margins). Reading time at the Conference is limited to twenty minutes. Scholarly notes should not exceed eight pages. Authors should submit two copies of their contribution, accompanied by return postage if they wish their paper to be returned.

The essays appearing in the *French Literature Series* are drawn primarily from the Conference papers. Authors are informed of the inclusion of their papers in the volume when their papers are accepted for the Conference. Exceptionally, *FLS* does publish outstanding contributions from authors not participating in the Conference. To be considered for inclusion in the volume, such essays should not exceed twenty typed pages. A style sheet is available upon request or online at <http://artsandsciences.sc.edu/dllc/FREN/LitSeries>

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The *French Literature Series* is published by Editions Rodopi. Communications concerning standing orders or purchase of individual volumes or back volumes should be addressed to:

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Internet: <<http://www.rodopi.nl>>

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From the Editor

This volume of *FLS* originated with the peer-reviewed submissions selected for our thirty-ninth annual French Literature Conference (FLC) and is dedicated to James Day, long-time *FLS* editor, frequent and versatile FLC organizer, respected critic of French and Francophone literature, inspired and inspiring teacher, steadfast and exacting champion of *le bon usage*, but, above all, valued friend and colleague.

Acknowledgement goes also to the editorial board, which determined final rankings after providing at least two blind evaluations of each submission. In cases where special expertise was required, our international advisory board stood ready to provide counsel. Both the annual conference and *FLS* are indebted to the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures and to the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of South Carolina for their generous support.

Jeff Persels

Jeff Persels

University of South Carolina

The Environment in French and Francophone Literature and Film: An Introduction

The theme for the thirty-ninth of our annual French Literature Conferences was originally inspired by what seemed to me to be the French-speaking world's delayed engagement with ecocriticism as well as by what also seemed to me to be ecocritics' initial lack of interest in reaching back and beyond the discipline's roots in nineteenth-century English and American nature writing. The vetted contributions to that conference, collected in this volume, demonstrate, on the contrary, a thoughtful and provocative commitment to using the tools of ecocriticism both to broaden and deepen our understanding of the representation of the environment in French in works spanning a variety of genres and media — novels, short stories, documentary films, philosophical treatises, political cartoons — extending in time from the early modern to the post-colonial and in space from France to Cameroon to the entire planet.

They respond, moreover, and in creative ways, to my own hopes for ecocriticism, which I, myself, came to somewhat tardily when asked by a colleague to think about its potential for my own field of inquiry, early modern France. As it happens, this coincided with a moment of heightened anxiety about the future not merely of the planet, but, more to the point for a journal like *FLS*, for the humanities. (I write sardonically, of course, but some days, when assessing the view from an American state university office, I am not so certain of that.) Could this relatively new, environmentally conscious approach, ostensibly rooted in a specific socio-historical moment, "open up" French studies, make them "accessible and relevant, to the larger society," as German

comparatist Ottmar Ette, excerpted in October 2010's apocalyptic issue of *PMLA*, advocated should be *the* survival strategy for literary studies in general? True, Ette references specifically neither French nor ecocriticism, but he does call, in particular, for attention to a greater *Überlebenswissen*, which critic Vera M. Kutzinski renders as "knowledge for survival." "For the humanities to survive in our present and future societies," Ette amplifies and Kutzinski translates, both channeling Nietzsche, "it is vital that they conceive of themselves as *sciences for living* [*Lebenswissenschaften*]" (983, emphasis hers). This is in calculated counterpoint to the increasing hegemony of the "life sciences" in the modern university. Literary scholars are thus encouraged to take the lead by capitalizing on their discipline's critical function to develop an open concept of life and of knowledge *about* and *for* living, systematically interrogating the "uses and disadvantages" literary scholarship has for life. Such knowledge must "serve life" – that is, it must be grounded in dialogue and theory rather than in ideology.

Ecocriticism is, I suspected then, and the articles collected here demonstrate, all over that. It very much claims to be a "science for living," a systematic interrogation of the "uses and disadvantages" of the biosphere, humanity's manipulative relationships to it, and the ways those relationships are currently, and have been historically, expressed. It is a sort of hermeneutics of the "knowledge *about* and *for* living" in harmony – or discord – with a weary planet. Drawing lifeblood from such iconic "green" writers as Thoreau, Wordsworth and Whitman and dating its "big bang" to the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, ecocriticism essentially addresses, as I have just observed, the relationship between humankind and the environment. Quoting from the 1996 manifesto-like *Ecocriticism Reader*, whose editors Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm themselves borrow from the mission statement of ASLE, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, the ecocritical goal is "to promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the relationship between human beings and the natural world" and to encourage "new nature writing, traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature, and interdisciplinary environmental research" (xviii). ASLE maintains an attractive and well-stocked website (www.asle.org), according to which it is "the country's premier membership organization in the field." Since 1993, it publishes *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*, once annu-

al, then biennial, now quarterly, since 2009, which gives us some proof of the burgeoning interest, at least within the academy.

Ecocriticism is a field that, despite its recent vintage, is apparently considered by its most seasoned practitioners already to be in its second generation. These two phases may be roughly distinguished as 1) critical attention to “the personal narratives of the Anglo-American nature writing tradition” (3), in the words of Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace whose 2001 anthology could already be titled *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*; and 2) what Armbruster and Wallace were trying to promote, i.e., “exploring the role of nature in texts more concerned with human cultures, by looking at the role of culture in nature, and by attending to the nature-focused text as also a cultural-literary text” (4). Similarly, and already in 1997, Jhan Hochman had published “an introductory critique” of what he referred to as an “emerging discipline”:

... the project of green cultural studies is the examination of nature through words, image, and model for the purpose of foregrounding potential effects representation might have had on cultural attitudes and social practices which, in turn, affect nature itself. (qtd in Coupe 187).

In practice this means, to follow Glen Love in his 2003 *Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology and the Environment*, “to reexamine and reinterpret the depictions of nature in the canonical works of the past” (34). Indeed, as former ASLE president and current *ISLE* editor Scott Slovic has expansively claimed: “there is not a single literary work anywhere that utterly defies ecological interpretation” (qtd in Love 34). Moreover, as John Talmadge and Henry Harrington observed in the introduction to their 2000 anthology, *Reading under the Sign of Nature. New Essays in Ecocriticism*: “Like feminism, ecocriticism is really less a method than an attitude” (ix). On the downside, it is true – although here it does keep company with Ette’s notion of *Überlebenswissen* I invoked above – it can become a (self-)righteous attitude, even going so far as to claim to redeem the humanities. Or at least to lend them new credibility by enabling them to play a redemptive role, by proposing a “natural” way of reading, in expressed contrast to what the movement often sees as the sterile endgame of preceding

theoretical approaches. To be sure, what one senses in much ecocriticism is as much a yearning or solicitude for an increasingly damaged nature as a desire for a more authentic critical relationship to it. As if the *-isms* of the past half-century were diabolically interposed between us and that authenticity, what, more aggressively, Greg Garrard has called “a coherent attack on the critical orthodoxies of today” (qtd in Coupe 182). Militant ideology did play a critical role in ecocriticism’s genesis, and very much continues to do so (including in some of the articles here): “If green studies,” contended Coupe a dozen years ago,

does not have an effect on [the complacent culturalism which renders other species, flora as well as and fauna, subordinate to the human capacity for signification], does not change behaviour, does not encourage resistance to planetary pollution and degradation, it cannot be called fully “ecocritical.” (4)

In support he cites one of ecocriticism’s “founding fathers,” Lawrence Buell, whose 1995 activist definition of the discipline was the “study of the relation between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmental praxis” (4-5). Ten years on, Buell was still demanding, in his 2005 *Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*: a “proto-ecological knowledge and environmentalist commitment” (2). Leaving aside the question of whether we can, or should, expect the literary authors we study to prove they “model ecocentric values” (Buell 22), or are “environmentally literate,” we might at least ask what it would mean for *us* to model ecocentric values and demonstrate environmental literacy when interpreting them, when mining them for a (hopefully) eco-conscious and -friendly *Lebenswissenschaft*. Widely-read ecocritic Jonathan Bate (*The Song of the Earth*) reformulated the question most usefully in 2000, in a way which bridges the gap between ecocriticism and what he calls “ecopoetics,” practitioners of each of which signed on for this volume of *FLS*:

It would be quixotic to suppose that a work of literary criticism might be an appropriate place to spell out a practical program for better environmental management. That is why ecopoetics should begin not as a set of assumptions or proposals about particular

environmental issues, but as a way of reflecting upon what it might mean to dwell with the earth. (266)

The ten essays that follow all reflect on just that. **Jonathan Krell** opens by shifting environmental criticism to France, considering the way its French terms have been set by *the* seminal polemicized philosophical exchange in “Michel Serres, Luc Ferry, and the Possibility of a Natural Contract.” **Louisa Mackenzie** marks how much more inclusive that natural contract has become in ecocriticism’s progress (“It’s a Queer Thing: Early Modern French Ecocriticism”), establishing provocative links between it and contemporary queer theory. **Christophe Ippolito**’s “Discours mythiques et écocritiques en dialogue: l’exemple d’Alexandrie d’Égypte,” narrows focus to a specific case study, that of the myth-shrouded Egyptian city of Alexandria, to consider the literal and figurative construction of urban, cultural space. **Walter Putnam** shifts to a different sort of colonial myth-making — one of the more shameful and regrettably long-lived — the exhibition of exoticized native populations of France’s far-flung empire in the contrived “natural” ecosystems of universal expositions (“Please Don’t Feed the Natives”: Human Zoos, Colonial Desire, and Bodies on Display”). **Claire Keith** guides us to and through the disfigured *terroir* of WWI in “Pilgrims in a Toxic Land: Writing the Trenches of the French Great War,” in a survey of the post-traumatic “ecological sensibility” of the literature that unprecedentedly destructive conflict spawned. Toxicity of a different sort and its role in both environmental and cultural homogenization and degradation in colonial Cameroon provide the dominant themes of **Marie Chantale Mofin Noussi**’s “Café toxique: éco-colonialisme et monoculture dans *La Terre du café* de Patrice Nganang.” **Stéphanie Posthumus** returns us to contemporary France in “Writing the Land/scape: Marie Darrieussecq’s *Le Pays*,” via the work of a French novelist whose sophisticated narrative devices invite (and receive) an ecocritical response. The representation of ecocriticism in the graphic lampoons of one of France’s most noted political cartoonists undergoes semiotic analysis in **Liliane Toss**’ “L’Environnement dans le dessin de presse de Plantu: étude sémiotique.” Finally, two treatments of the innovatively filmed and distributed Yann Arthus-Bertrand eco-documentary *HOME* round out the volume. **Leon Sachs** considers the film’s pedagogical message and technique in the comparison with of the influential nineteenth-century

republican children's tutorial *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants*. *HOME* scriptwriter and environmental activist **Isabelle Delannoy** closes with an exposition *cum* manifesto of the film's call for new forms of expression to translate climate and environmental science into accessible and effective calls for action.

Each contribution to this edition of *FLS* thus constitutes as much a *mise en pratique* of ecocritical practice, across a variety of French-speaking and -thinking spaces and media, as a constructive *mise en examen* of ecocriticism as a vital and viable *Lebenswissenschaft*.

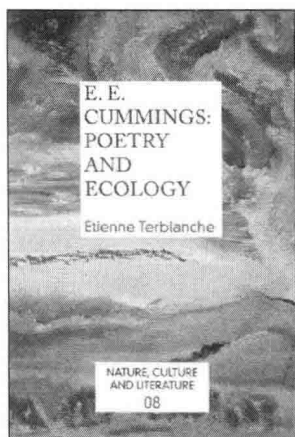
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E. E. Cummings: Poetry and Ecology

Etienne Terblanche



By employing the modernist devices of fragmentation, recombination, and accentuated blank space, E. E. Cummings engages singularly with being on earth. This ecological achievement was largely ignored by the New Critics, and the subsequent semiotic spirit which has been holding that the sign hardly has to do with concrete existence on earth ironically perpetuated the neglect. In this book Etienne Terblanche shows that Cummings's ecology relocates his *oeuvre* and status in contemporary discourse. For, the poet follows, mimes, and connects with the unfolding changes of earthly existence and growth—what he views as the 'Tao' of being—in his lyricism, sex poems, satire, and visual-verbal poems. This is true especially of the elusive manner or 'how' of his poetry overall. Careful ecocritical reading of this active culture-nature integrity in his poetry brings about an imperative

new understanding and placement of his project. It further serves to show that, in their different ways, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound engage with nature in a similar way, thus again accentuating the importance of Cummings's poetic project to the neglected and vital ecocritical perception of modernism in poetry.

Amsterdam/New York, NY
 2012. 262 pp.
 (Nature, Culture +
 Literature 8)
 Paper €55,-/US\$72,-
 E-Book €50,-/US\$65,-
 ISBN: 978-90-420-3541-6
 ISBN: 978-94-012-0816-1

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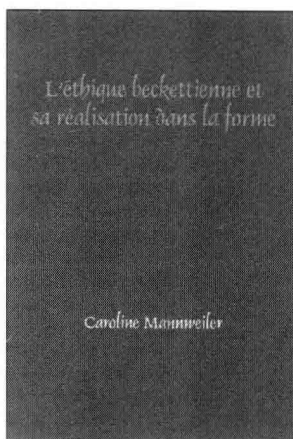
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L'éthique beckettienne et sa réalisation dans la forme

Caroline Mannweiler



Tout en étant influencée par la théorie esthétique d'Adorno ainsi que par la pensée deleuzienne, *L'éthique beckettienne et sa réalisation dans la forme* ne cherche pas à formuler son sujet à travers un système philosophique. L'étude se propose bien plus de le développer à partir et à travers les œuvres de Beckett. Plus précisément, elle retrace l'éthique beckettienne au fil d'une analyse portant sur le contenu des œuvres, sur les réflexions poétologiques de Beckett ainsi que sur les évolutions formelles de l'œuvre, évolutions qui ne sont pas seulement décelées dans les œuvres tardives et leurs innovations médiatiques mais dans l'ensemble de la prose et du théâtre de Beckett. Un chapitre sur les préférences de Beckett concernant la peinture illustre les liens entre esthétique et éthique dans l'univers beckettien. Des chapitres sur Sartre, Camus et Ionesco axés autour des sujets de la liberté et de la solitude humaine présentent l'originalité de l'éthique beckettienne, éthique

ni moderne, ni postmoderne, mais tout à fait pertinente.

Caroline Mannweiler est chargée de cours au département de littérature générale et comparée à l'université de Mayence.

Amsterdam/New York, NY
2012. 260 pp.
(Faux Titre 379)
Paper €55,-/US\$72,-
E-Book €50,-/US\$65,-
ISBN: 978-90-420-3551-5
ISBN: 978-94-012-0825-3

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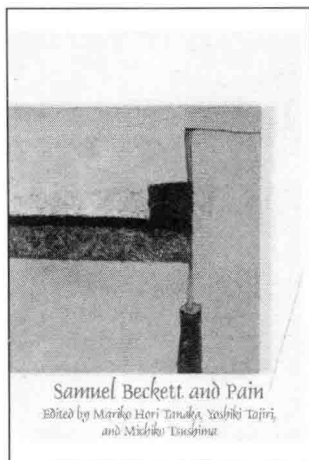
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Samuel Beckett and Pain

Edited by
Mariko Hori Tanaka,
Yoshiki Tajiri, and Michiko Tsushima



Samuel Beckett and Pain is a collection of ten essays which explores the theme of pain in Beckett's works. Experiencing both physical and psychological pain in the course of his life, Beckett found suffering in human life inevitable, accepted it as a source of inspiration in his writings, and probed it to gain deeper insight into the difficult and emotionally demanding processes of artistic creation, practice and performance. Acknowledging the recent developments in the study of pain in literature and culture, this volume explores various aspects of pain in Beckett's works, a subject which has been heretofore only sporadically noted. The topics discussed include Beckett's aesthetics and pain, pain as loss and trauma, pain in relation to palliation, pain at the experience of the limit, pain as archive, and pain as part of everyday life and language. This volume is characterized by its plural, interdisciplinary perspectives covering the fields of literature, theatre, art, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. By

suggesting more diverse paths in Beckett studies, the authors hope to make a lasting contribution to contemporary literary studies and other relevant fields.

Amsterdam/New York, NY
2012. 247 pp.
(Faux Titre 372)
Paper €50,-/US\$65,-
E-Book €45,-/US\$59,-
ISBN: 978-90-420-3523-2
ISBN: 978-94-012-0798-0

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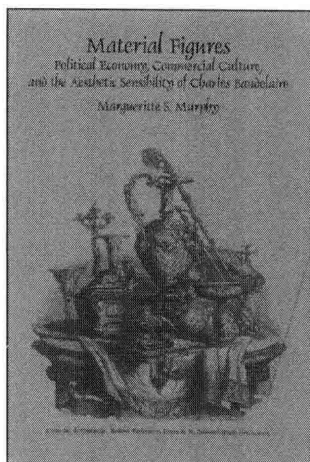
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Material Figures

Political Economy, Commercial Culture, and the Aesthetic Sensibility of Charles Baudelaire

Margueritte S. Murphy



Ideological debates about economics and aesthetics raged hotly in nineteenth-century France. French political economy was taking shape as a discipline that would support free-market liberalism, while *l'art pour l'art* theories circulated, and utopian systems with aesthetic and economic agendas proliferated. Yet, as this book argues, the discourses of art and literature worked in tandem with market discourses to generate theories of economic and social order, of the model of the self-individuating and desiring subject of modernity, and of this individual's relationship to a new world of objects. Baudelaire as a poet and art critic is exemplary. Rather than a disaffected artist, Baudelaire is shown to be a spectator desirous of both art and goods whose sensibilities reflect transformations in habits of perception. The book includes chapters on equilibrium

and utility in economic and aesthetic theory, on the place of the aesthetic in press coverage of the industrial exhibitions, on the harmonic theories of Baudelaire's early art criticism, aimed at a bourgeois audience, on Baudelaire's radical cosmopolitanism learned through viewing "objects" on display at the Universal Exhibition of 1855, and on *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *Le Spleen de Paris*, where language makes visible the traits of a new material world.

Amsterdam/New York, NY
2012. 252 pp.
(Faux Titre 375)
Paper €55,-/US\$72,-
E-Book €50,-/US\$65,-
ISBN: 978-90-420-3526-3
ISBN: 978-94-012-0801-7

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Rétif de la Bretonne spectateur nocturne

Une esthétique de la pauvreté

Philippe Barr



À la lumière d'une réflexion sur les motifs politiques à l'origine du sort réservé à l'œuvre de Rétif de la Bretonne par ses contemporains, cet essai propose de replacer l'écriture rétifiennne au sein des stratégies de pouvoir qui, de Fontenelle à Marmontel, sont à l'œuvre dans le champ symbolique et culturel des Lumières. À partir d'une étude détaillée de la mise en scène de l'écriture qui ouvre *Les Nuits de Paris*, l'auteur démontre que Rétif convie son lecteur à une exploration esthétique de la pauvreté en s'inscrivant dans une tradition littéraire qui s'ouvre avec le *Spectator* d'Addison et *Le Spectateur français* de Marivaux. En dégageant l'horizon littéraire d'une œuvre qui s'écrit et qui relate avec minutie les étapes de sa genèse et en étudiant le positionnement dans le champ littéraire de son narrateur fictif, le *Spectateur nocturne*, l'essai dégage ainsi une véritable « posture littéraire » qui

amorce la transition entre la figure emblématique du philosophe des Lumières et une conception déjà « moderne » de l'écrivain.

Amsterdam/New York, NY

2012. 192 pp.

(Faux Titre 377)

Paper €40,-/US\$52,-

E-Book €36,-/US\$47,-

ISBN: 978-90-420-3539-3

ISBN: 978-94-012-0814-7

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